Opening Words

I know it is not easy. I am not trying to minimize the pain you feel. Some of you have stories of horrendous deeds done against you. I understand. But, eventually, you must forgive.

174 Eph Six Ways to Live as a New Man 5 Bad behavior

Paul has already told us a lot. He has identified lies that we believe and tell others. He has spoken to those in the Body of Christ who have trouble stealing and he has spoken of our speech habits that need to be cleaned up and refined so that we impart words of grace to others. All this is so that we might bring joy and not grief to the Holy Spirit of God who works in us to help us live according to our new status in Christ and who has sealed us for the great day when we enter fully into our inheritance.

Today, we continue looking at Paul's instruction for a life of purity. He has described the life of pagan darkness from which we have been saved. Now he is providing step by step instruction for our new life in Christ. Now, like a fisherman casting a large net, he is trying to catch many other sins that swim around in our hearts. But because we often don't classify them as major sins, we let them move about in our hearts.

Let's see what he says in Ephesians 4:31 through 5:2.

> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Paul identifies six areas to clean out and tells us three positive steps to take.

First, get rid of bitterness. Someone once described bitterness as drinking poison and expecting another person to fall over dead. Bitterness is the anguish we feel that turns into anger for another's offenses against us. Rather than forgive, we hold on to the offense and build up a grudge. Friends, I think you know that is one of the most damaging things you can do to yourself and you will not only poison yourself but others around you with your bitter spirit. The classic verse on this is Hebrews 12:15 where the writer says, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled."

Notice that the bitterness affects the one who is bitter and those around him. The bitterness grows into a large plant bearing poisonous fruit that others eat. We have all been hurt by others, but we must learn to release the other person for his sins against us. We must commit the judgment into the hands of God. We must trust God to show the other person his wrongs, and we must find grace to forgive and not remain bitter.

Second, we must lay aside wrath and third we must put away anger. Wrath is passionate rage. Think of King Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament who had his dream. He was so troubled by it and no one could tell him the dream or interpret it for him. In rage, he commanded that all the counselors of his court be executed. His demand was an impossible demand, yet he still wanted to kill all the wise men of Babylon. Now that's wrath! Hopefully you and I have not been subject to that kind of wrath, but I am sure many of us have felt the rage of another. It's not pleasant. It doesn't feel good. If you have this problem – you must ask God to help you put aside wrath.

Paul also lists anger. If wrath is the explosive expression of displeasure, anger is the quieter sullen hostility that builds up inside a person. They have hatred in their heart and they wait to carry out their anger. They let it build up in their heart before it explodes in wrath. Paul tells us, "get to work on that area of your life. If your first reaction to displeasure is not wrath but is a quiet buildup of hostility toward another, then you must recognize that that is against the character of God as well. Put it aside."

Fourth, Paul mentions clamor. This is the kind of person who is loud and tries to get his or her way by shouting or screaming. It seems this is the only way they know how to get their way and they are loud about it and everybody else will know about it. It's an unpleasant scene. Put it aside.

Fifth, Paul mentions slander. This is the third time Paul has referred to sinful speech. In 4:25 he speaks of lies. In 4:29 he speaks of inappropriate, unwholesome speech. Here he shows another way our speech can be inappropriate – slander. Slander is like stealing. Stealing takes possessions from others. Slander takes away another's reputation. Slander is untrue words we spread about others. It is different from gossip because gossip is spreading true things about someone that others do not need to know. Gossip is telling something to someone who is not part of the problem or the solution. It has the same effect as slander because it results in the person's loss of reputation, but slander is the sin of spreading false information about another.

Sixth, and last in this list, Paul mentions malice. Malice is having ill will toward another. It is wishing evil upon another and plotting against the person. Anger that festers within a person can go in one of two directions. It can explode in wrath as we saw above or it can continue to seethe within a person and manifest itself in wicked plotting to bring harm to another. "Put it aside," Paul says and don't let this be part of your life or the life of anyone in the church.

Paul then provides three positive behaviors to practice; be kind to one another, be tender-hearted, and forgive each other has Christ as forgiven you.

Kindness was a great virtue in the early church. Some have thought it was treasured because of the Greek word for kindness – it sounds just like the word Christ. Christ in the Greek is *christos*. Kindness in the Greek is *chrestoi*. It's almost as if kindness is a synonym for Christ himself and because of this similarity in sound it became a prized virtue. But apart from its pleasant sound and that it reminds us of Christ, we should put on kindness towards others because people need it. It opens hearts and enables grace to get into a needy heart.

Paul tells us to be tender-hearted. Remember how Paul characterized the darkness of paganism in 4:18-19? He said at the root of all the wicked practices is hardness of heart. Hardness of heart

comes when people turn away from God. We learned that the word itself refers to the hardness of marble and was carried over into the medical world to refer to a bony formation on the joints. Paul then described such people as having a callous over them so that they are insensitive to the touch of God and his voice. But God's people have received the oil of the Spirit. God's people have had the hardness of heart softened and the callous has become new fresh skin that is sensitive to touch. Paul says, live this way towards others. Don't be calloused towards others. Don't harden your heart towards others. Be tender-hearted.

Then he says, forgive each other as Christ has forgiven you. This is the greatest expression of our brotherly love because we can be kind to people and tender-hearted with others without them sinning against us but Paul is talking about being this way with people who have hurt us or offended us. "Forgive them," Paul says, "and if you have trouble forgiving them remember this, God has forgiven you." It's like the story of the servant in Matthew 18. He was forgiven of a debt of millions of dollars. But then he demanded payment of a debt to him of a hundred dollars. How shameful, how shortsighted when we refuse to forgive others.

I know it is not easy. I am not trying to minimize the pain you feel for what others have done to you. Some of you have stories of horrendous deeds against you and you need counseling to process the emotions and heal the pain. I understand. But, eventually, we must forgive. I love the word for forgive. It's the noun *grace* in verb form. If we turn the word grace into a verb we could translate it, "and grace one another just as God in Christ has graced you." Isn't that good? And the foundational way that God has graced us is by forgiving us of our many sins against him. If God has done that to us, surely, we can impart grace to others by forgiving them.

A few years ago, I wrote a little book called The Prodigal Son and His Prodigal Father. It is my retelling of the famous story we find in Luke 15 – a story of forgiveness with God, forgiveness with others, and learning how to let go of guilty feelings in our hearts, of the self-condemnation and self-loathing that can so easily keep us in bondage. If you haven't received a copy of it today, why not write to us and receive one for your own encouragement.

This will help you live what Paul is saying in this passage. This will help you be a man or woman who puts aside the bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice. This will help you put on a heart of kindness, tenderness, and be a person who forgives. It's so important. The name of God is glorified in us and among us when we put off these old clothes of sin and put on the new clothes of Christ-like living.